

Dutch, Flemish, or Hollandic?

Social and ideological aspects of linguistic convergence and divergence during the United Kingdom of the Netherlands (1815–1830)

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1. Introduction

When the Low Countries were reunited as the United Kingdom of the Netherlands (UKN) at the start of the nineteenth century, language became one of the central issues in the newly founded nation-state. The Dutch language, by royal decree, gained new functions in the Southern provinces of Flanders, where French had been the dominant H-variety (Ferguson 1959) under previous regimes. This sparked fierce opposition from the francophone elite, but also triggered ample discussion among Southern speakers of Dutch, who became increasingly aware of the differences between their own variety of the language, and that of the new regime of the North. Issues of language choice (Dutch versus French) and language variation (Northern versus Southern varieties of Dutch) became ever more ideologically marked, and produced a large number of pamphlets, articles, and publications about language, highlighting different sides of the debate.

In the present paper, I will investigate several of the issues at stake in these meta-linguistic discussions. After a brief historical sketch (section 2), I will focus on language and nation, providing a survey of the official language policy of the UKN government in the Southern provinces, and analyze different arguments of the opposition and supporters by means of Bourdieu's concept of 'legitimate language' (section 3). This approach will be carried through into the next part, where issues of language and identity will come to the fore (section 4). I will discuss the role of spelling features as shibboleths of diverging Northern and Southern linguistic practices at the time. A discussion of different linguistic publications will reveal a prominent language ideology that highlighted the unity of the Dutch language on the one hand, but emphasized the linguistic superiority of the Northern variety on the other hand (section 5).

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2. Historical background

Northern and Southern Low Countries were separated politically at the end of the sixteenth century as a result of the Dutch revolt against the Spanish regime. Whereas the North entered its Golden Age as the Republic of the United Provinces, the South remained under foreign rule, initially under the Spanish crown, and from the early eighteenth century onwards as part of the Austrian empire. At the end of the eighteenth century, the Southern Netherlands were conquered and subsequently integrated into the French First Republic, and after different client state regimes of France, the Northern provinces also became part of the Empire, in the early years of the nineteenth century.

This separate political development up until the early 1800s is believed to have had significant linguistic consequences as well. Burke (2005: 20) summarizes this as follows:

If we look at the old 17 provinces of the Low Countries as a whole, there is evidence of increasing cultural divergence between North and South in the seventeenth century – more exactly, from the 1580s onwards – notably in religion and in art. It is plausible to suggest that this divergence, a contrast to the situation in both France and England, extended to language as well. In the South, there does not seem to have been any standard, so the choice was between speaking French or Spanish and speaking dialect.

Classic histories of the language such as de Vooyo (1952: 66) have repeatedly emphasized how the ‘cities of Holland took over the leading position from the declining South, also linguistically’,² and the image of a thriving Dutch Republic, where the first successful attempts at codification of the vernacular took place, is contrasted with a period of strong linguistic decay in the South. This negative view of Southern Dutch is usually related to the dominance of French in different important domains of society:

Flemish [i.e. Southern Dutch – rv] disappeared as a language of culture; it was thrown over to the lower classes. As it had been deprived of contact with the North for a long time, which could have revived it, it had, in fact, fallen apart into a series of local dialects lacking the superstructure of a literary language. [...] It was contaminated to a disastrous extent due to contact with French. (Deneckere 1954: 262)³

² All translations are our own. The original reads: ‘Terwijl dus het zwaartepunt van de Nederlandse kultuur naar het Noorden verplaatst werd, en de Hollandse steden, ook op taalkundig gebied, de hegemonie overnamen van het achteruitgaande Zuiden, heeft tegelijkertijd een taalmenging plaats [...]’.

³ ‘Le flamand disparaissait ainsi comme langue de civilisation ; il était abandonné aux classes inférieures. Depuis longtemps privé du contact avec le Nord qui aurait pu le revivifier, il s’était, en fait, émietté en une série de parlers locaux, privés de la superstructure d’une langue littéraire. [...] [I]l se contamina, au contact du français, dans des proportions désastreuses.’

This image is widespread in the historiographical literature, and the period of cultural and linguistic decline is often taken to have reached an absolute low point after the French invasion of the 1790s. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Dutch in Flanders is claimed to have been nothing more than a chaotic and mutually unintelligible collection of dialects: ‘As opposed to the relative uniformity in the written language of the North, absolute chaos ruled the South’ (Suffeleers 1979: 19).⁴

As I will also demonstrate later on, this negative image of the Southern Netherlands is mainly based directly on contemporary outcries about the state of the language, rather than on empirical investigations of linguistic material of the time. Recent research on language choice in Brussels has shown that the Frenchification of public life became successful only during the French rule from 1795 onwards (De Ridder 2005; De Ridder 2006; cf. also Van Goethem 1990; Vanhecke & De Groof 2007). Before that time, ‘Frenchification in the Southern Netherlands had been restricted [...] to the court, the aristocracy, the higher clergy, the higher bourgeoisie and sophisticated and artistic circles’ (Witte & Van Velthoven 1999: 56). Moreover, recent explorations of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century language use and the Flemish normative tradition have problematized the ‘myth of Southern language decay’ (van der Horst 2004; Rutten 2009a; Rutten 2009b; Rutten 2009c; Vosters 2009a; Rutten & Vosters 2010; Rutten & Vosters 2011; Vosters forthcoming). The emerging image seems to be that Southern linguistic decay existed by and large exclusively *on a discursive level*. However, complaints about the state of the language to justify an author’s personal linguistic efforts were common throughout the eighteenth century and far from restricted to the Southern Netherlands. As far as the normative tradition is concerned, it is safe to assert that differences between North and South in terms of written language use were minimal. Especially towards the end of the 1700s, a separate yet similar Southern writing tradition started to consolidate itself – not at all prone to ‘linguistic chaos’, but stable, uniform, and closely linked to the normative tradition of the North. I will return to this image of linguistic degeneration in eighteenth-century Flanders later and explore its impact on the sociolinguistic landscape of the years following the French rule.

In 1814, the London protocol settled the fate of the Low Countries after the initial defeat of the Napoleonic troops, and less than one year later, Northern and Southern Netherlands were joined under the sovereign rule of the Dutch monarch William I. The goal was to create a stable and enlarged buffer state to the North of France, and the European superpowers counted on the Dutch king to bring his new territories together into a ‘close and complete reunion’.⁵ This decision unified the

⁴ ‘Tegenover een relatieve schrijftalige uniformiteit in het Noorden heerste in het Zuiden een absolute chaos.’ Cf. also Wils (1956; 2001).

Dutch language area in a single political entity, and language was seen as one of the key elements in the nation building enterprise. Although the United Kingdom of the Netherlands only lasted from 1815 until 1830, when the Belgian revolution made a sudden end to it, its unique political configuration and its specific linguistic composition make for an interesting test case in historical sociolinguistics.

3. Language and Nation

3.1. Languages in the New Kingdom

The new and enlarged Kingdom of the Netherlands was multilingual from the start. According to rough data from 1829, about three quarters of the 6.2 millions of inhabitants were native speakers of Dutch – or: a variety of Dutch.⁶ Half of those speakers lived in the North, the other half in the Flemish South. With nearly 1.5 million francophones in Wallonia, French was the largest minority language. Nonetheless, French also played a significant role in the Flemish provinces where Dutch was the majority language, given the bilingual competences of a social and political elite (cf. Vandenbussche 2003).

Shortly after the reunion of the Low Countries, King William I was quick to emphasize that the national language of the new kingdom had to be Dutch, i.e. *Nederduitsch*, which was to be understood as ‘Hollandic, Flemish and Brabantic’ – subordinate to this main language, Walloon, French, and High German would serve ‘for those who do not speak or understand Dutch’ (Colenbrander 1909: 502).⁷ Especially for the Flemish provinces of the South, the Dutch language was seen as a major element in the nation building process, where linguistic unity would facilitate cultural unity. In order to achieve the ‘one nation, one language’ ideal,⁸ the king counted on the linguistic unity between Flanders and the Netherlands and implemented an ambitious Dutchification policy to restore the public importance of the language in Flanders.

⁵ The first article of the London Protocol of June 1814 reads: ‘Cette réunion devra être intime et complète de façon que les deux pays ne forment qu’un seule et même état [...]’ (Colenbrander 1909: 27).

⁶ This is according to the information given by de Keerbergh de Kessel (1834: 290–293). These figures are, however, based on population data per province, and can only be seen as very rough estimates of linguistic divisions. Clearly, bilingual competences are not accounted for in any way, and neither are speakers of languages other than the official language in a particular province.

⁷ ‘Nationale taal Nederduitsch zijnde Hollandsch, Vlaamsch, Brabantsch. Subsidiair Waalsch of Fransch, ook Hoogduitsch voor die geene die geen Nederduitsch verstaan of spreken.’

⁸ Cf. De Jonghe (1967: 15–23). It is nonetheless important to emphasize the pragmatic approach of the government vis-à-vis the Walloon territories, where no attempts at a forced Dutchification policy were made (De Groof 2004: 174; Janssens & Steyaert 2008).

3.2. Status planning

Already in 1814, the provisional government issued a first language law for the Flemish provinces. It restored the use of Dutch for certain legal deeds, but also announced new language provisions in the future (Blauwkuip 1920: 24–36; De Jonghe 1967: 40–44). After several years of consulting with various Northern and Southern advisors, King William I's language policy took more shape in 1819, when he issued a royal decree calling for the complete Dutchification of the judiciary and public administration in the Flemish provinces.⁹ The government allowed for a transitional period of three years, after which Dutch would become the exclusive language of the administration. Civil servants and magistrates were encouraged to learn Dutch, and those unable to comply with the new requirements by January 1823 would be transferred to the French-speaking areas. As will be demonstrated below, this policy effectively made Dutch into the most important language for anyone aspiring to a career in the public sector at the time.

Education was seen as a crucial pillar needed to support the language policy in the long run.¹⁰ The main focus in primary schooling was on improving the level and quality of education, and an entirely Dutch-speaking teacher training institute was founded in Lier in 1818. In secondary education, Dutch was introduced gradually, and became the sole language of instruction by 1828–1829. Although Latin still served an important role in higher education, three chairs of Dutch language and literature were established in the South, and Northern academics were attracted to promote and lend prestige to the language.¹¹

3.3. Legitimate Language: The Struggle Between Dutch and French

It is in this context that the concept of 'legitimate language', as outlined in Bourdieu (1982),¹² may shed more light on the underlying power relations between the different languages in the public sphere. In Bourdieuan theory, linguistic interactions are framed, not mainly as direct communicative acts, but as a means of social distinction:

⁹ Initially, it only applied to the provinces of Antwerp, East Flanders, West Flanders and Limburg, but in 1822 it was extended to include the districts of Brussels and Leuven as well. See the initial draft decisions in De Jonghe (1967: 269–280).

¹⁰ See De Jonghe (1967), Behling & De Metsenaere (1982) and De Vroede (2002).

¹¹ See Janssens & Steyaert (2008) for the chair in Liège, Weijermars (2009a) for Ghent, and De Jonghe (1967: 211 ff) for Leuven.

¹² The work was translated into English in 1991, albeit expanded and with a different chapter composition. The original edition was used as a basis for this research, but citations will be taken from the translated work for the purposes of this article in English.

‘a system of linguistic oppositions which is the *re-translation* of a system of social differences’ (Bourdieu 1991: 54). Linguistic competence is not seen in grammatical or strictly linguistic terms, but rather as the ability to produce and reproduce the legitimate code within a unified linguistic marketplace:

The dominant competence functions as linguistic capital, securing a profit of distinction in relation to other competences [...], so that the groups which possess that competence are able to impose it as the only legitimate one in the formal markets (the fashionable, educational, political and administrative markets) and in most of the linguistic interactions in which they are involved. (Bourdieu 1991: 56–57)

The key concept, legitimate language, or ‘that language which has acquired a place of pre-eminence through forms of institutional discourse’ (Watts 1999: 42), can be applied to the situation of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands in various ways. I will first take a macro perspective, and examine the opposition between Dutch and French.

Between 1815 and 1830, the actors in the field of institutional and public language use suddenly found themselves in an entirely new and altered sociolinguistic situation, where Dutch – and more specifically: the written standard of Northern Dutch – had been brought forward as the legitimate language, at the expense of French. I have already given an overview of the official Dutchification policy (section 3.2 above), which caused a significant number of francophone civil servants and local government officials to learn Dutch in order to further their careers.¹³ Also, the policy sparked a large number of pamphlets and publications dealing with the new ‘national language’.¹⁴

In most initial publications of proponents of Dutchification, the link between language and nation is picked up very clearly, and just like the Dutch reign is hailed as a relief from the previous French tyranny, the Dutch language is affirmed as the national language, as opposed to French. Although most language legislation is not passed until 1819, many already expressed a clear hope for a restoration of Dutch in public life before that time. Leo De Foere, a Southern columnist, sends out a warning in 1815, threatening that, if no action is taken, ‘our country would remain Frenchified, and thus weak, divided, without a national spirit, without backbone, and it will never be able to fully withdraw itself from the highly detrimental influence of France’ (De Foere 1815: I, 44–45).¹⁵ There is a clear realization that the

¹³ See, for instance, the case of the French expatriate Toussaint, as discussed in De Jonghe (1967: 90, 298) and Vosters (2009b: 46).

¹⁴ Cf. Sabbe (1936; 1939).

¹⁵ In the original: ‘[...] anders blyft ons land verfranscht, en gevolgenlyk zwak, verdeeld, zonder volksgeest, zonder zenuwen, en zal zig noyt aen den hoogschaedelyken invloed van Frankryk geheellyk kunnen onttrekken.’

prestige which the French language acquired over the preceding decades cannot easily be undone, as ‘nearly all Flemings believe that their language should stand aside for the French language’ (Mulle 1819: 1).¹⁶ A lot of effort is thus spent on justifying Dutch as the official language. Vandembroeck (1817) sums up historical, pedagogical and linguistic grounds for its supposed superiority. Van Genabeth (1821), a Northern teacher in the Southern provinces, defends his mother tongue against oft-heard prejudice, and focuses on the glorious history of the shared language of North and South. Visscher (1825) follows along the same lines. A common theme in all of these publications, especially from the early years of the Kingdom, is the strong emphasis on the unity of the language. ‘Flemish’ and ‘Brabantic’ are characterized as regional variants under the umbrella term *Nederduitsch* ‘Dutch’, as is Northern ‘Hollandic’ (Vandembroeck 1817: voorbericht, cf. also Van Genabeth 1821: 24–25). Even an author such as Behaegel, who would later lead the fierce opposition against Northern Dutch, still strongly adhered to the idea of ‘one and the same language’ in North and South (Behaegel 1817: 480).¹⁷ I will return to this topic in section 4 below.

It is clear that most of the early militant pro-Dutch pamphlets show a strong need to affirm Dutch as the ‘legitimate language’. Given the still fairly uncertain position of the language before the large-scale Dutchification from 1823 onwards, this may not be very surprising – a clear struggle for legitimacy marks the tension between Dutch and French in Flemish public life, and many dissident voices could also be heard.¹⁸ Already in 1815, the Brussels-based lawyer Barafin published a treatise in which he posed the question whether the Low Countries did have a national language at all. He argues that French has served as the language of government in the entire Southern Low Countries for centuries, and is thus better suited as a national tongue. This argument, which also appears in Plasschaert (1817), relies heavily on the claim that Dutch could not serve to unite all of the inhabitants of the new Kingdom given the lack of a unified Dutch standard. Although most francophones were willing to recognize Hollandic as a language of culture and history, “there is no honest Dutchman who does not know that any inhabitant of Brabant is incapable of having a long discussion in his own language with a Northerner using his own dialect” (Barafin 1815: 41–42).¹⁹ A similar line of thought can be found in Defrenne (1829: 8–9), who claims that ‘the pronunciation and the orthography of Flemish is

¹⁶ ‘Byna alle de Vlaemingen zyn van geloof dat hunne Tael voor de fransche Tael wyken moet.’

¹⁷ ‘[...] dat de Hollanders en de Belgen, schoon zy maer eene en de zelfde tael hebben, [...]’

¹⁸ For more information about the treatises dealt with, see Sabbe (1936). Most of them were also discussed by J. F. Willems (1824).

¹⁹ ‘[I]l n’est point de Hollandais de bonne foi qui ne sache [...] qu’un Brabançon est incapable de soutenir, dans son langage, une discussion de longue haleine avec un Batave maniant bien son dialecte.’

actually radically different from that of the Hollandic language'.²⁰ Attempts to challenge Dutch as the new language of government also draw on the prestige of French as a European language of culture and enlightenment (Plasschaert 1817: 9, 14).

The majority of these oppositional treatises were published before the Dutchification efforts announced in 1819 and carried out in 1823. When it had become clear that the Dutch language had irreversibly been promoted to be 'the only legitimate one in the formal markets' of administration, law and education (Bourdieu 1991: 56–57), the protests decreased to a certain extent, and remarkably, some of the early opponents such as P. P. J. Barafin did not even hesitate to demonstrate their knowledge of Dutch to the government in order to further their own careers (De Jonghe 1967: 95–96).

3.4. Implementation and Outcome

In the light of the above described opposition, the actual implementation and outcome can be reasonably questioned. The success of the Dutchification policy has been a matter of some debate (cf. Willemys & De Groof 2004; Vosters & Vandebussche 2008: 4–5), and it is important to note that the UKN only lasted until 1830, meaning that the Dutchification policy as whole could barely take effect. Although several traditional accounts of the history of Dutch have assumed King William's language policy to be a failure, more recent research into *de facto* language use has shown that the shift from French to Dutch actually occurred rather smoothly. Vanhecke (2007: 368) investigated to what extent the policies were followed in 133 Flemish town chancelleries, and concluded that '[i]t is remarkable how prompt and trouble-free the planned Dutchification of public life in Flanders actually took place. [...] Except for Brussels, where a bilingual situation existed, the law was adopted and implemented everywhere'.²¹ Van Goethem (1990) examined language choice in the judicial domain and reached similar conclusions: after the transitional period between 1819 and 1823, nearly everyone switched to the new national language, with only rare exceptions. This indicates that the basis of support for the governmental language planning efforts may not be underestimated.

In 1829 and 1830, when the protests against the government were at a peak and Southern revolts were imminent, William I issued a last series of royal decrees con-

²⁰ In French: 'la prononciation et l'orthographe du flamand *proprement dit*, différent du jour à la nuit, de celles de la langue hollandaise.'

²¹ 'De bewering dat de taalpolitiek van Willem I jammerlijk mislukt is, klopt niet. Het is daarentegen opmerkelijk hoe vlot en probleemloos zijn geplande vernederlandsing van het openbare leven in Vlaanderen in werkelijkheid verliep. [...] Met uitzondering van Brussel, waar een tweetalige situatie bestond, bleek dat deze wet overal geïmplementeerd en toegepast werd.'

cerning language, restoring many linguistic privileges for French in the entire South (De Jonghe 1967: 225 ff). This has been seen as the collapse of the Dutchification policy. Nonetheless, as research on the ‘petition movements’ has shown, the language policy only became truly controversial when the general protest movements against the government gained momentum, causing the linguistic grievances to become part of a larger feeling of religious and political discontent. In the initial protests, language issues were not taken up as official grievances (De Jonghe 1967: 229 ff; François 1992: 132–133).

4. Language and Identity

4.1. Legitimate Language: The Struggle Between Northern and Southern Dutch

So far, I have mainly dealt with the opposition between Dutch and French as two distinct languages within the new nation state. However, several sources have already referred to a second opposition, between Northern and Southern varieties of Dutch. The supposed lack of a common language was often used as an argument in favour of French (cf. *supra*), and in the next paragraphs, I will investigate the role of internal-linguistic variation in the construction of diverging and converging discourses of Dutch. The focus will be laid on the discursive framing of linguistic difference, although I will also touch upon the role of actual orthographical practices in North and South, as spelling features acquired symbolic meaning in the debates and played an important role in social, cultural and ideological identity formation. This is a necessary addition to the above perspective, as Bourdieu’s (1991: 45) concept of linguistic legitimacy is explicitly not limited to the power relationships between individual languages:

In order for one mode of expression among others (a particular language in the case of bilingualism, a particular use of language in the case of a society divided into classes) to impose itself as the only legitimate one, the linguistic market has to be unified and the different dialects (of class, region or ethnic group) have to be measured practically against the legitimate language or usage.

It is important to note that there were no active government efforts concerning corpus planning in the South. For the North, an official spelling (Siegenbeek 1804) and grammar (Weiland 1805) had been commanded by the Batavian government years earlier and were still valid and in use at the time of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands.²² For the South, no such official norms existed, and various reports of government officials indicate that there was no urgent desire to impose the Northern

²² Needless to say, these norms were far from followed by everyone. Especially, literary authors rebelled against the Siegenbeek spelling norms, after the model of *Bilderdijk* (1826); see Mathijssen (1988).

norms upon the Flemish language users. The Minister of Education, R. A. Falck, commented on this delicate issue in 1822 by stating in a letter to a colleague in government:

For that matter, I am of the opinion that, for the time being, there need not be any ordinances from the government to change or modify, on high command, Flemish language use – in this regard, time and further language study by the Flemings will need to allow for a certain opinion to gain ground and establish itself. (Falck 1822, in Colenbrander 1915: VIII, 584–585)²³

Henri Schuermans, at that time public prosecutor in Bruges, similarly goes against claims about Northern language varieties being forced upon Flanders: ‘The way in which the national language is used or written is of no concern to the government. [...] The freedom of spelling is guaranteed for every Dutch citizen’.²⁴ In other words, the government did not take action to regulate which kind of Dutch was being written in Flanders, as long as it was Dutch, and not French.

However, as pointed out by Bourdieu (1991: 50), ‘the effects of domination which accompany the unification of the market are always exerted through a whole set of specific institutions and mechanisms, of which the specifically linguistic policy of the state [...] form[s] only the most superficial aspect’. When examining the distribution of power between different varieties, there can be no doubt about the legitimacy and supremacy of the Northern Dutch language norms in the official and public domains. First of all, the government itself used the Siegenbeek orthography in all of its publications, laws, correspondence, and official reports. Also, the same Siegenbeek orthography gained dominance in the educational field, as more and more school books moved away from typically Southern spelling choices (Rutten & Vosters 2010). Linguistic guidebooks used in teaching the new national language to francophone inhabitants of the kingdom were almost exclusively based on the prescriptions of Siegenbeek and Weiland (cf. Janssens & Steyaert 2008). To Northern observers, the Southern variety of the language could not count on a large amount of linguistic prestige. Characteristic is an article in *Journal the Bruxelles*, in which a Hollandic lawyer and linguist explained that he had no objections to Southerners writing in Dutch, as long as they would realize that their administrative writings were often considered to be either ridiculous or unintelligible to the Northern ear, and could in no case compete with the ‘purity’ of the Hollandic dialect used by Northern literary authors (van Lennep 1823: 3–4).

²³ ‘Overigens zoude ik van oordeel zijn dat vooralsnog geene verordeningen van gouvernementswege moeten plaats hebben ter verandering of wijziging, op hoog gezag, van het Vlaamsche taalgebruik, waaromtrent men aan den tijd en aan eene voortgezette taalbeoefening door de Vlamingen moet overlaten, eene bepaalde meening te doen veld winnen en te vestigen.’

²⁴ Cited as part of a public lecture on in February 1822, and written down in a letter to Minister van Maanen in May of the same year. The entire letter is reprinted in Colenbrander (1915: VIII–2, 576–580).

All of the above developments clearly granted legitimacy to Northern writing practices over their Southern counterparts, and helped to establish Northern Dutch as the dominant code. I will explore the effects of this unequal power distribution in the next sections, focusing on the actual knowledge and use of Northern language variants (*connaissance*), versus the recognition and discursive construction of Northern linguistic superiority (*reconnaissance*).

4.2. Production of the Legitimate Code

First, however, I need to make a short excursion into the actual linguistic differences between Northern and Southern varieties of Dutch at that time in order to gain a better understanding of what the languages debates in Flanders were actually about. An observer unfamiliar with the history of Dutch might at this point be thinking that Northern and Southern varieties of Dutch may not have been mutually intelligible in the 1820s. Whereas this might be true for some *spoken* dialects from different regions of the language area,²⁵ the differences in the written language were minimal, and mainly revolved around orthography. De Simpel (1827: 6) mentions as the three main points of divergence:

- Southern undotted <y> (e.g. *wyn* ‘wine’, *kleyn* ‘small’) versus Northern dotted <ij/i> (e.g. *wijn* ‘wine’, *klein* ‘small’);
- the spelling of long vowels, either by adding the grapheme <e> in the South (e.g. *zwaard* ‘sword’), or by doubling the original vowel in the North (e.g. *zwaard* ‘sword’);
- the Southern practice to use accents to distinguish the lengthened *ē* and *ō* out of Wgm. short vowels (e.g. *geéft* ‘gives’, *hoópt* ‘hopes’) from the monophthongized *ê* and *ô* out of Wgm. diphthongs (e.g. *been* ‘leg’, *boom* ‘tree’).

While some other features could be added to this list,²⁶ the set is extremely limited, and it is clear that this variation could not have caused problems of mutual intelligibility – an occasional accent or an undotted rather than a dotted <y> could not have kept Southerners from reading and understanding texts from the North, or vice versa. Also, the differences were far from absolute. Even in the normative tradition, some ‘Northern features’ were propagated by Southern authors, and some ‘Southern features’ also appeared in grammars from the North (Rutten & Vosters 2010; Rutten & Vosters 2011). What happens, rather, is that the debate centres around these linguistically fairly insignificant points of orthographical divergence, which developed into shibboleths and became increasingly symbolic for Northern

²⁵ See Visscher (1825: 144) for reports about comprehensibility problems in the spoken idiom.

²⁶ E.g. the endings of dental root verbs in the second or third person singular of the present indicative as <d> or <dt>, or the spelling of the third person singular nominative masculine articles, with or without a final *-n* (cf. *infra*).

and Southern language use. Simple oppositions such as Flemish <y>, <ae> or <éé> versus Hollandic <ij>, <aa> or <ee> allowed for easy differentiation between the two varieties, and made it possible for Southerners to position themselves vis-à-vis the North through their written language use. Adopting a ‘Northern’ or ‘Southern’ orthography could become a matter of social distinction, and spelling became the object of intense political, ideological and cultural identity work.

On the one hand, a number of Southerners felt discontented with the new political union between North and South, and propagated a clear and distinct Southern identity by continuing to use Southern spellings. Thus challenging the dominance of Northern Dutch, so-called ‘particularist’ dissidents emphasized the singularity of Southern Dutch varieties and resisted the supposed Hollandophile tendencies of adversaries who too eagerly turned their gaze northwards. Religious issues often played a role in this antagonism, and the opposition of the Catholic South versus the protestant North entered the arena of language use and orthography as well. An interesting example comes from the grammar of a Roman Catholic priest, F. L. N. Henckel, who fiercely struggled against Northern *de* instead of Southern *den* as the masculine form of the definite article in the nominative case. In the South, *de* was reserved for feminine nouns, and thus, he argued, the Northern practice to leave out the <n> and to write *de paus* ‘the pope’ rather than *den paus* was a heresy, ‘attributing an unnatural gender to the Holy Father and causing disciples to stray’ (Henckel 1815: 135).²⁷ The linguistic opposition to Northern Dutch became more salient as the protest movement against the regime grew, and voices for a separate ‘Flemish’ language especially grew stronger after 1830, when the Southern Netherlands separated themselves from the United Kingdom in the so-called Belgian revolution.²⁸ When Pieter Behaegel, a later notorious Flemish linguist, looked back on the period of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands some years after the Belgian independence, he claimed that the supposed mutual incomprehensibility of Northern and Southern politicians was due to the irrepressible Northern penchant for change: the Hollanders had strayed from the true language of their forefathers, just like they had digressed from the path of true Christianity in the past (Behaegel 1837: 34–35). In this line of thought, language change is associated with a shift in religion, and both are condemned.

²⁷ ‘Niet *de* Paus, gelijk de Hollanders willen in den noemer van ‘t enkelvoud; want volgens onze grondregels [...] zou men den Paus een oneigen geslacht toeschrijven, en den leerling leeren doolen.’

²⁸ Concerning the situation in the later part of the nineteenth century, Willemyns (1993) emphasizes that it would be incorrect to reduce the polemics to an extreme ‘particularist’ and an extreme ‘integrationist’ position. As has been argued in Vosters (2009b), this is also true for the period of the United Kingdom, when later ‘particularists’ such as Behaegel or De Foere still defended the unity of the Dutch language.

On the other hand, the Northern language norms were also praised and gratefully accepted by many Southerners. Exploratory corpus studies have shown how the Siegenbeek variants of the above mentioned spelling issues found receptive ground in administrative and judicial documents in all of the Flemish provinces (Vosters 2009a; Vosters et al. 2012; cf. also Vanhecke 2007). A stream of pamphlets and linguistic publications appeared defending the superiority of Northern Dutch (cf. section 5), and in normative publications between 1815 and 1830, the older Southern spelling variants slowly gave way to the Northern Siegenbeek counterparts (Rutten & Vosters 2010; Rutten & Vosters 2011). This success and spread of Northern language features must be related to the idea that the language of the South, supposedly in decay for over two centuries, was somehow inferior to the language of the North. One important aspect that cannot be disregarded, is the social relevance of adopting the Northern norms. Many Southerners readily abandoned their native language variety in order to secure their linguistic capital by switching to Northern Dutch. One of the ways in which supporters of the new language policy started positioning themselves in the field, is by gathering in newly-founded ‘literary societies’, where native and non-native speakers alike were stimulated to use the Dutch language creatively and proficiently.²⁹ These societies attracted a large number of civil servants and people from the judiciary, as well as a fair number of artists and literary authors – all gathered on a regular basis to read Northern Dutch poetry, to hold lectures about literary, linguistic and nationalistic topics, and to study the Northern language. Most importantly, however, the organizers of such events did not hesitate to inform the higher authorities in The Hague about their self-proclaimed ardent zeal for the mother tongue – which often resulted in financial support for their activities, and considerable opportunities for professional advancement. The aforementioned Schuermans was a leading figure in these circles. Only shortly after a 1822 public lecture about Northern and Southern spelling practices, in which he was eager to emphasize the linguistic preeminence of the North, the counsel for the prosecution of Bruges saw himself promoted to the prestigious post of deputy attorney-general in Brussels.³⁰ Another telling example is Jan Frans Willems, whose career advanced alongside his commitment to the Dutch language, while at the same time, his spelling choices developed from typically Southern (as still in Willems 1818) to more Northern (from his 1824 essay onwards).³¹

²⁹ See Blauwkuip (1920: 348–263) for an overview, De Clerck (1963) for a case study.

³⁰ The text was sent to the Minister of Justice on May 24, 1822, and Schuermans was promoted on September 25, 1822 (Van Hille 1981: 245). See Colenbrander (1915, VIII–2: 576).

³¹ In 1821 he was appointed as tax collector in Antwerp. A letter of recommendation by J. M. Kemper can be found in Colenbrander (1915, VIII–2: 461).

5. The Reproduction of Legitimacy: Discourses of Linguistic Superiority

For Bourdieu, the production and reproduction of linguistic legitimacy cannot be limited to simply knowing and using the dominant code – just as important is the metalinguistic acknowledgement of its dominance:

[T]he social mechanisms of cultural transmission tend to reproduce the structural disparity between the very unequal *knowledge* [‘connaissance’] of the legitimate language and the much more uniform *recognition* [‘reconnaissance’] of this language. (Bourdieu 1991: 62)

The recognition of Northern Dutch as the legitimate language can certainly be observed in metalinguistic publications from the United Kingdom of the Netherlands, and will be examined below. First, however, a side note about the claim that *reconnaissance* of the legitimate code is typically much more widespread than *connaissance*, or actual knowledge of the authorized usage. This is related to Bourdieu’s conception of linguistic habitus as elusive, unconscious and hard to change – often mentioning the patterns of *r*-dropping observed in the work of William Labov (Bourdieu 1991: 51, passim; cf. Watts 1999: 42). Nonetheless, the form of linguistic legitimacy examined and discussed in the present article is based on orthography, which is conscious and deliberate by definition. Contrary to the subtle mechanisms behind a speaker’s imitation of the *r*-less speech of enviable social groups, written language cannot be produced without halting to actually think about how to spell. Literate language users could learn to switch from one orthographical system to another, especially when the differences were so minimal as in the discussed case study, and several guidebooks existed to familiarize Southerners with Northern spelling practices (e.g. Cannaert 1823; De Simpel 1827). Thus, by pointing out the symbolic values attached to spelling, and by examining the function of a limited number of orthographical features as shibboleths for Northern and Southern Dutch, I hope to have shown that, while linguistic habitus as such may not be easily prone to change, this does not necessarily hold true for visible and conscious expressions of language, such as orthography. Hence also the claim of a more limited knowledge of the legitimate code versus a more widespread recognition of its linguistic authority needs to be reconsidered slightly, in view of the observed and fairly wide spread of Siegenbeek spellings.

Along with the spread and expansion of Northern linguistic features, a dominant discourse can be observed attributing superior qualities to the language of the North in comparison with the inferior language of the South. I have already shown that, in some of the francophone oppositional pamphlets, the Hollandic variety was recognized as a language of culture, yet its shared foundation with Flemish was challenged. Now I will focus on the arguments made by proponents of the language policy, and examine how they framed Southern Dutch vis-à-vis Northern Dutch and French.

On the one hand, there is often a strong emphasis that Northern and Southern varieties of Dutch all constitute one language, for which the cover term *Nederduitsch* is used (cf. section 3.2), justifying it as the national language in opposition to French.³² On the other hand, however, a supposed linguistic superiority of the Northern variety is very much underlined within this unified Dutch language, thus reinforcing its position as the legitimate code. The opposition between North and South is frequently framed in sharp historical terms, as in Cannaert (1823: 42–43):

In the Northern provinces of our fatherland, our mother tongue has been cultivated since long, and with the greatest success [...]. But in the Flemish provinces, the national language has never been pursued, where it is only recently being awoken from its deep slumber.³³

Justifications for the supremacy of contemporary Northern Dutch were pervaded by a strong standard language ideology (Milroy & Milroy 1985; Milroy 2007), pointing towards the fixed and invariable norms of Siegenbeek (1804) and Weiland (1805). Also, processes of *erasure* can be detected, ‘in which ideology, in simplifying the sociolinguistic field, renders some persons or activities (or sociolinguistic phenomena) invisible. Facts that are inconsistent with the ideological scheme either go unnoticed or get explained away’ (Irvine & Gal 2000: 38). In this particular case, language and spelling variation in the North, both in normative works and in actual writing practices, is simply ignored in order to magnify the contrast with the South. It is in this sense that Schuermans speaks about the ‘spelling and grammar of Siegenbeek and Weiland universally followed in the Northern provinces’.³⁴ Furthermore, apart from obscuring linguistic complexity in the North, the reverse side of this argument entails downplaying the Southern history of standardization, to emphasize that Flemish language use could not serve as a linguistic norm. If the Northern writing practices were to be adopted as superior, then the Southern language varieties needed to be exposed as inferior. Willems (1824: 34) sets the tone by deploring the supposed lack of a uniform Flemish normative tradition:

[F]lemish spelling has not been fixed to the level of a general Flemish standard by anyone up to the present. [...] [E]ach schoolteacher in the Southern provinces [...] considers himself qualified to teach the children whatever language rules his whim might have dictated him.³⁵

³² Cf. the argumentation in De Foere (1815: I, 44–45), as discussed in section 3.3. A similar line of defense can be found in Vandenbroeck (1817).

³³ ‘[I]n de noordelyke gewesten van ons vaderland, alwaer de moedertael, sints lange, met het beste gevolg, is beoefend geworden; [...] maer in beyde Vlaenderen, alwaer de landtael nooyt is aengetrokken geworden, alwaer dezelve maer eerst uyt haren diepen slaep [...] getrokken wordt, [...]’

³⁴ ‘[D]e in de noordelijke provinciën algemeen gevolgde spelling en spraakkunst van Siegenbeek en Weiland’ (Schuermans 1822, in Colenbrander 1915: VIII–2, 578).

³⁵ ‘[D]e Vlaemsche spelling [is], tot heden toe, nog door niemand op vaste gronden van algemeenen Vlaemschen aerd gebracht is. [...] [E]like schoolmeester, in de Zuidelyke Provincien, [...] acht zich bevoegd om den kinderen alzulke taelwetten voorteschryven, als hem door het hoofd zyn gewaaid.’

Again, *erasure* can be observed, yet not in the traditional sense, but rather the exact reverse: an ideology altering the linguistic field by *shaping* more variation than there actually was, in order to distance oneself from it. Arguments such as Behaegel (1817: 250), who claims that ‘[i]n our part of the country, there are almost as many ways of spelling as there are people who worked on improving the spelling’, are not supported by empirical corpus research, but did provide an excellent basis on which pleas for the Northern language norms could be constructed. As a result of this, many Southern intellectuals felt – and sometimes cultivated – a sense of linguistic inferiority about their native language variety. Some authors even went so far as to apologize in the preface of their work for any Southern linguistic features that might be found lingering on in their work:

If any expressions may have slipped through the cracks here or there, betraying the region where I was born, I hope to count on the forgiveness of my Dutch readers, so that they may swiftly pardon these expressions, as one cannot genuinely expect a young man to achieve perfection right away, in a first attempt. (Vandenbroeck 1817: voorberigt)³⁶

On the whole, the dominant language ideology among supporters of the Dutchification policy, such as J. F. Willems, H. Schuermans, and others, is based on iconization,³⁷ in such a way that linguistic closeness (between Northern and Southern Dutch) was used to justify and rationalize desired political and social closeness (between the Northern and the Southern provinces). Accordingly, the myth of Southern language decay is being shaped and reinforced, which, as was also made clear in section 2, remains prominent until the twentieth century.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to outline the sociolinguistic situation of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands in the early nineteenth century by focusing on meta-linguistic discussions about language and linguistic variation at the time. I first tried to apply Bourdieu’s concept of legitimate language and linguistic habitus to the discussions about the role of Dutch versus French within the nation building enterprise under the new government. I then shifted my focus to ideological aspects of

³⁶ ‘Mogt mij hier of daar nog eene uitdrukking ontglipt zijn, die den grond verried, waarop ik het levenslicht aanschouwde, ik durf van de toegeeflijkheid mijner Nederlandsche lezers verwachten, dat zij die zoo veel te eer zullen verschoonen, daar het van eenen jongeling, in eene eerste proeve, niet wel te vergen is, dat hij dadelijk de volmaaktheid bereike.’

³⁷ Cf. Irvine & Gal (2000: 37) who define iconization as ‘the transformation of the sign relationship between linguistic features (or varieties) and the social images with which they are linked. Linguistic features that index social groups or activities appear to be iconic representations of them, as if a linguistic feature somehow depicted or displayed a social group’s inherent nature of essence’.

variation within the Dutch language, discussing the symbolic value of orthographical shibboleths. I demonstrated how the new sociolinguistic context of the united Netherlands brought about a widespread knowledge of the Northern legitimate code, but also led to the discursive construction of a strong monoglossic standard language ideology based on the recognition of Northern Dutch as the dominant variety. It has often been suggested that the period between 1815 and 1830 was responsible for renewing the linguistic contact between North and South, establishing Northern writing practices in Flanders, and thus laying out the foundations for the later codification of a common orthography and shared language norms. Our analyses of the metalinguistic discussions surrounding language add to this, that the period of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands can certainly also be seen as an important step in the discursive construction of the linguistic supremacy of Holland. As the political and linguistic field changed radically with Belgian independence in 1830, when the dominance of French was reestablished in official domains, the arguments in favour of a shared language between North and South gradually gained more ground, and ideological aspects of the relationship between both varieties of Dutch would continue to dominate throughout the nineteenth and well into the twentieth century.

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